

This Week in Congress

October 8, 2007

Dear Friend,

Welcome to "This Week in Congress." This week the House passed legislation to strengthen the ability of Inspectors General to uncover waste, fraud and abuse in government, as well as legislation related to government contractors in Iraq. I hope you find this newsletter useful.

Pushing for Sunshine and Accountability on Earmarks

While the U.S. House has brought more transparency to the earmark process in the annual legislation that funds the federal government, current House rules do not allow Members to dispute these funding requests for home state projects when they are inserted into non-funding bills. I support legislation that would change these rules to require all taxpayer-funded earmarks to be subject to debate and challenge in the House.

The earmark system should not be a process closed off to review and scrutiny. It is only right that Kansans know how their dollars are being spent when bills are being voted on in the House. The spending habits of Congress are out of control. By bringing needed accountability into the earmark process, my hope is that we can reduce overall government spending. [Click here](#) to read more.

Veterans Affairs Officials Assure Funding for Fort Riley State Veterans Cemetery

As I discussed in last week's edition of this newsletter, I recently spoke to leadership at the Department of Veterans Affairs about not delaying important funds for the construction of the Fort Riley State Veterans Cemetery. This week, officials at the VA assured me that funding will soon be provided for the cemetery. An agreement between the VA and the state of Kansas will be finalized in the coming weeks so construction can begin this fall as planned. [Click here](#) to read more about the state veterans cemetery.

Recognizing Kansas Couple for their Work on Behalf of Children

Earlier this year, I nominated Nick and Jennifer Keller of Home City as a 2007 "Angel in Adoption" for their outstanding advocacy of adoption issues. Nick and Jennifer were in Washington, D.C., this week for the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute's annual gala honoring people from across the country who have enriched the lives of foster children and orphans. State Representative Sharon Schwartz of Washington accompanied the Keller's to the event.

During a period of three years, the Keller's and their daughter, Brooke, have opened their home to six children, each of whom was exposed to methamphetamine before being born. The presence of illegal drugs, especially meth, is a serious problem in many rural Kansas communities that threatens families and children, including the unborn. Each year, more than 4,300 Kansas children are exposed to illegal drugs while in the womb.

I enjoyed the opportunity to visit with Nick and Jennifer. It is another reminder that the fight against meth requires the cooperation of all members of a community. The Keller's are an inspiration and an example of caring Kansans doing what they can to make a positive difference in the lives of others.

Recognizing October as Domestic Violence Awareness Month

October is National Domestic Violence Awareness month. Despite the best efforts of many volunteers and hardworking law enforcement, more than four million Americans continue to find themselves victims of physical, psychological and sexual abuse each year. It is important that we bring public attention to this private issue and offer our support to those who work every day to help victims of domestic violence. I especially commend those who work in the nine service areas of the First District - Dodge City, Emporia, Garden City, Great Bend, Hays, Hutchinson, Liberal, Salina and Ulysses.

This week, I spoke in the House of Representatives about the need to break the cycle of domestic violence and the important role the federal government plays in supporting local programs that serve victims. [Click here](#) to watch my speech.

Hearing Discusses Need for Workers in the Agriculture Industry

The House Agriculture Committee met this week to talk about the labor needs of the American agriculture industry. We heard from agriculture organizations and farmers about issues they face in operating their businesses. Despite employing more than three million people every year in the U.S., many business owners are facing a shortage of farm labor. The most common conversation I have with Kansas businesses is the need for skilled workers.

Discussing Transportation Issues with Former Kansas Governor Bill Graves

I met with former Kansas Governor Bill Graves this week to talk about transportation issues within the agriculture industry and challenges facing the trucking industry. After serving as the Governor of Kansas from 1995 to 2003, former Governor Graves became the head of the American Trucking Associations. I enjoyed the opportunity to visit with Governor Graves and discuss issues important to Kansas.

Selection Board Interviews Applicants for the U.S. Service Academies

The 2007 First District Service Academy Selection Board met this weekend at the Eisenhower Center in Abilene to interview students applying for admission to the U.S. Military Academy, U.S. Naval Academy, U.S. Air Force Academy and U.S. Merchant Marine Academy. The opportunity to meet with these bright young men and women as they apply to become the next leaders in our military is one of my favorite responsibilities as a Member of Congress.

This important process would not be possible without the help of my selection board, which is made up of community leaders from across the state who take a great interest in seeing our students succeed. The members review applications and conduct interviews before making recommendations to me.

This year's board members included Dr. Mace Braxton and Mike Junk of Salina, Jean Clifford of Garden City, DeLany Fawkes of Liberal, Donna Graham of McPherson, Steve Harmon and Ron Whitney of Emporia, Karesa Harrison of Great Bend, Rita Hauck of Hays, Dr. Kate Lehner of Junction City, Ron Lucas of Goodland, Bekki Pribil of Pratt, Chris Orwoll of Hutchinson, Paula Ripple of Dodge City, Dick Schwartz of Marion and Tobias Wood of Marysville.

Visiting Hill's Pet Nutrition in Topeka

On my way to the airport on Monday, I stopped in Topeka to tour Hill's Pet Nutrition and visit with the company's management. Hill's is a global company headquartered in Kansas that makes high quality feed products for cats and dogs. The company provides jobs to hundreds of Kansans and is an important contributor to our state's economy. Hill's recently announced plans to build a new 300,000 square-foot plant in Emporia that will employ more than 100 people.

My thanks to CEO Bob Wheeler, CFO Rick Wienckowski, Legal and Governmental Affairs Vice President Ken Morse, Global Business Development Vice President Joy Klemencic and Vice President of Clinical Nutrition Dr. Dan Richardson for their time.

Touring Agriculture Businesses in North Central Kansas

On Friday, I visited three agriculture businesses in north central Kansas. My first stop was in Clay Center at the Hutchinson-Mayrath Plant. Hutchinson-Mayrath manufactures farm and grain handling equipment, including things like augers and conveyors. The company has recently experienced significant growth, expanding into domestic and international markets that include Mexico and Russia. Hutchinson-Mayrath has had a presence in Clay Center for quite some time and employs hundreds of area residents. Mayor Sharon Brown joined me in the tour and discussion led by CEO Cliff Williams and Vice President of Engineering Dwight Benninga.

Next, I visited Sunflower Hills in Washington. Sunflower Hills is a replacement swine facility that is owned by a group of local investors. The facility incorporates the latest technologies to maximize productivity, minimize environmental impact and maintain the health of the animals within the facility. Thanks to Scott Bokelman, Farm Credit swine specialist, and Brice Sawin with Ag Management Services, Inc. for the tour of the facility.

Finally, I toured the Linn Willow Creek Dairy, LLC in Linn. This dairy includes about 1,200 head of cattle and employs approximately 30 full- and part-time workers. The dairy participates in the EQUIP program and uses the funding for the facility's manure management. It was good to see farm bill conservation programs at work in Kansas. Thanks to Manager Lee Holtmeier and CFO Rodney Ohlde for taking time to show me the operation and also to County Commissioner Gene Helms, Kansas Dairy Association board member Steve Ohlde and Rick Brumfield with the Dairy Farmers of America for joining us.

It is always productive for me to meet with Kansans involved in the agriculture industry. While they make great contributions, they also face many challenges. The topic of conversation at all three visits was a desire to expand business operations, but that a shortage of workers prohibits these companies from doing so.

Visiting with Folks in Agenda

I stopped in Agenda, a small community in Republic County, on Friday and visited with folks at The Cedar Porch, the library, United Farmers Cooperative, the soda shop and service station. We talked about several issues including the fall harvest and the values common to small towns that make them great places to live and raise a family. I also had the opportunity to meet Raymond Carlson, a former state representative who served from 1947 to 1970.

Participating in Lincolnville Oktoberfest Parade

On Saturday, I was in Lincolnville to participate in the annual Oktoberfest Parade. The community event takes place the first weekend of October and features arts and crafts, food and entertainment. Thanks to Ryan Wallace for driving me in the parade.

In the Office

Paul Livingston of Topeka, CEO of Kansas Rehabilitation Hospital, and Pam Stanberry of Wichita, CEO of Wesley Rehabilitation Hospital, were in to talk about Medicare patients accessing rehabilitation services. Dr. Ronald Walker, Lamont Godsey and Debbie Bengtson of Junction City were in with USD 475 Geary County Schools to discuss the expansion at Fort Riley and the increased need for Impact Aid funding. Logan Cain of Hutchinson was in with the People to People educational program to learn more about my role in Congress. Karl Peterjohn of Wichita was in with the Kansas Taxpayers Network to share information about federal spending and taxes.

Dr. Mark Fleury of Seneca was in to talk about health insurance and the importance of training students in the fields of mathematics and science. Dr. Fleury is serving as a Science and Technology Policy Graduate Fellow at the National Academy of Engineering in Washington, D.C. Steve Dailey, Karin Jacoby and John Patrick of Kansas City; Larry Brennen of Wyandotte County; and Dan Fuhrman of Leawood were in with MO-ARK to discuss water resource development projects, including flood prevention and bank stabilization projects along the Kansas and Missouri Rivers. The new president of Bethany College, Dr. Edward Leonard, was in to introduce himself.

Nathan Augustine of Hays was in our nation's capital participating in the National Youth Leadership Forum and stopped by to visit. Sarah Zerr of Hays and Alex Jansen of Lincoln were in with the Congressional Youth Leadership Council to talk about current issues before Congress. Dick Veach and Catherine Veach Moyer of Ulysses were in to report on telecommunications issues facing rural communities. Kansas State Representatives Sydney Carlin of Manhattan, Annie Tietze of Topeka and Geraldine Flaharty of Wichita also stopped by

to visit.

Brennen Clouse, Sarah Short and Julica Bonsall of Goodland; Katie Renne of Cherokee; and Jesse Marden of Manhattan were in with Family Career and Community Leaders of America to voice their support for increased funding for the Carl D. Perkins program, which supports technical and career education initiatives. Kay Mitchell of Hill City, Korey Hensley of Salina and Mary Baskett of Shawnee were in with the Kansas Head Start Association to discuss the need to reauthorize the State Children's Health Insurance Program and talk about the importance of funding the head start program. Cyd Slayton of Mission Hills and Tuck Duncan of Topeka also stopped by the office this week.

Ross and Gayla Wichman of Ellis, Jolene Niernberger and Jerry Stanfield of Hays and Darrell and Leann Ploutz of Kanopolis stopped by my office this week for a tour of the U.S. Capitol Building. In from Hutchinson for a tour were Michelle Wray, Pat Self, John and Wynema Pierson and Ron and Linda Miller.

Very truly yours,

Jerry